

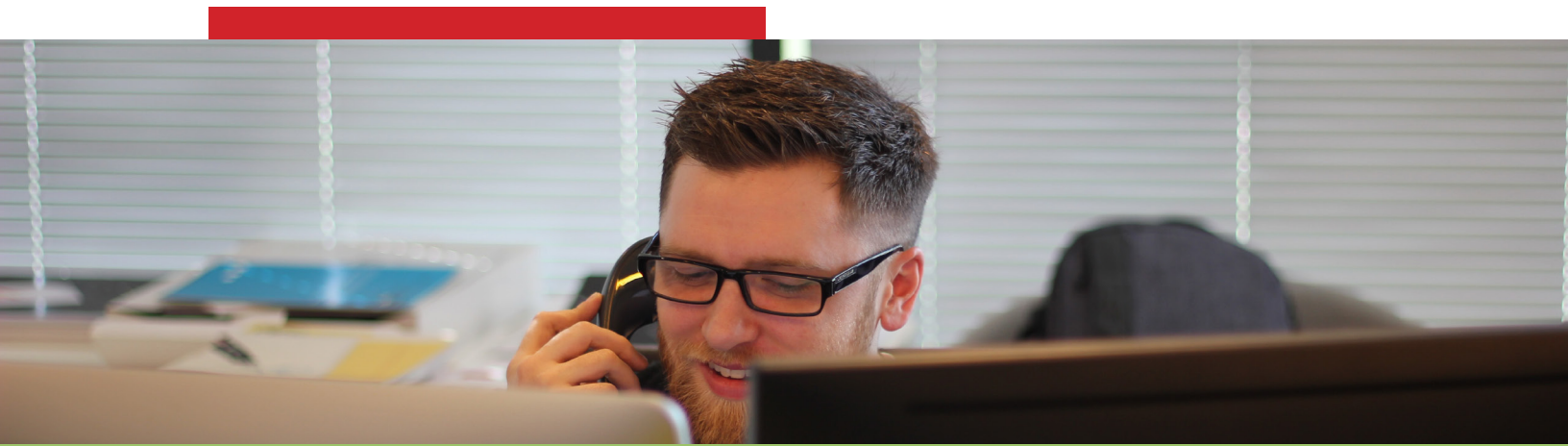
REIMAGINING THE WORKPLACE



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With the right mobile application, attorneys and staff can download the freedom they want while the law firm maintains the control and security it needs.

The days of commuting from home to an office building are a distant memory for millions of Americans. Thanks to the rise and adoption of mobile technologies, boundaries between the workplace and the rest of the world are blurring, if not disappearing altogether. Some firms are working on a fully remote basis, some are using a hybrid remote/office schedule, and there is heightened accommodation for as-needed situations, whether short or long-term.

This turn toward mobility offers firm employees increased flexibility and improved work-life balance — a high priority for all professionals, especially those from the millennial generation. In fact, it's such a high priority that the Society of Human Resource Management's 2020 annual survey of employee benefits revealed that 78% of employers expanded telework options, and on the list of 'most valued' benefits, 83% ranked flexible work as extremely or very important to offer. Robert Half's State of Legal Hiring survey released in December 2019 listed flexible work arrangements as the top retention incentive (aside from compensation or bonus).

According to Global Workplace Analytics, the number of employees regularly working from home in the US has risen 115% over the past decade. Clio's 2021 Legal Trends Report notes 79% of legal consumers see the ability to work remotely with a lawyer as a key factor in choosing who to work with, up significantly from just 23% in 2018. Also, more than half of clients specified a strong preference for using a video conferencing solution at multiple points in a legal matter.

Technological solutions that support mobility are becoming a standard feature clients expect a law firm to offer. Mobility is not just benefitting the telecommuter, though. It's making life easier for staff and attorneys who spend most of their time in the field or technical staff who may spend the day on the move. It allows those personnel and others to have better access to firm contacts. It makes it easier for them to stay connected to the office, giving them the freedom to work from anywhere yet maintain the consistency of being in the office.

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productivity. When employees use their own devices — like personal smartphones or tablets — that's one less piece of technology that the company may not have to purchase. Some states require the company to pay for an employee's mobile phone if they use it for work-related calls. With boundaries blurring between the office and the rest of the world, there are also savings on office space and facilities that can be realized if businesses don't need to house as many employees physically.

Managing a growing mobile workforce

Not surprisingly, this restructuring and reimagining of where employees work poses some serious challenges. One of the biggest involves technology, particularly using mobile devices and maintaining a connection back to the law firm's communications system. Think about it: When remote or mobile employees make calls, what device are they most likely to use even if they have a company-provided phone on their desk at home? It's going to be the one that is most comfortable and easy to use: their personal cell phone.

Smartphones have become an increasingly vital part of most peoples' lives. How vital? The numbers vary by survey, but as many as two-thirds of Americans — and more than 90% of those between 18 and 29 — sleep with their smartphone on or near their beds.

This is just another way of saying it's unrealistic for employers to think their employees will separate themselves from such an important and ingrained life tool, whether they are in the office or working from home. And the data bears this out. According to the market research company Gartner, personal device usage in the workplace is already high. In a global survey of over ten thousand workers, 55% reported using a personally owned smartphone or laptop for work at least some of the time.

While part of that 55% can be attributed to personal preference, employees often use personal phones because they simply have no other choice. Their options are to either use their desk phone when they are in the office or their personal device when they are not. Without a solution that allows them to use their personal device but remain connected to the firm communications system, the employee loses access to business information. Meanwhile, every client contacted outside of the firm's system is an unmonitored relationship because the firm cannot analyze call quality or maintain an updated log of interactions.

That's why it's vital to match employee desires with firm interests.



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Employee expectations for a mobile solution

Employees wanting to take advantage of mobility for business purposes are willing to adapt to the law firm's needs if the solution meets specific criteria.

The application will provide real value.

If a firm is going to ask their people to install a new app on their personal cell phone, it needs to be intuitive, easy to use, and provide real business value. That could mean allowing access to real-time presence information, like an employee's directory of coworkers. It could also mean simplifying how employees in the field communicate with each other or those in the office — either by calling or sending a quick, secure chat message. It could additionally provide access to client information, such as through integration with the firm's practice management software.

The application will look and feel familiar.

Any mobility app must feel like something firm employees already know how to use. It needs to have the same look, feel, and user experience that employees are used to on their mobile devices. It doesn't have to be a complete copy, but it should have familiar buttons in the same place with all the basic functionalities and capabilities.



The application will keep employees' personal information private.

While employees are clearly comfortable using personal devices for business, a certain amount of privacy is also expected. Everyone wants assurance that even though information may appear together when using the mobile application, there is a barrier between personal and company data that keeps the two divided. As a specific example, it's imperative to keep attorney personal phone numbers protected.

But it's not just information that's a concern. Employees are also looking to set limits on their availability to maintain the work-life balance so many note as important. The right app can help personalize call routing schedules to ensure they never miss a business call while in the field yet ensure after-hours calls are routed to their office voicemail.





Law firm expectations for a mobile solution

When it comes to mobility, employers have much more at stake than their employees. Any solution needs to support business objectives. That means it needs to aid in employee connectivity and productivity so business doesn't slow down when people work remotely or in the field. It also needs to protect both company data and client relationships.

Calls can be recorded for record-keeping and performance measurement.

Clients are currency, and firms need to protect those relationships. But when employees are speaking to clients on their personal mobile phones, the business loses control of the relationships being built with those customers. What happens if one of those employees leaves the firm? Clients could easily leave with them. Or what if a client isn't happy with their service and cancels an agreement? Suppose that client has only been talking to firm staff on a personal mobile phone. In that case, the business has no visibility into those complaints, no understanding of the customer's issues, and no way to get in front of any problems.

Also, if employees use their personal phones to make business calls, the firm cannot track those calls or even record that the calls took place. Administrators or senior staff can't listen in on calls to offer coaching. And with the reliance on billable hours, not being able to track the time attorneys or staff are on the phone could mean lost revenue.

The right app can allow employees to have 'single-number reach,' meaning employees are available no matter where they are via a single phone number. This allows the firm to make sure all calls are being routed through its phone system. The employee gets the flexibility to use a personal device, and the firm keeps control of its data.



Remote and field employees will be accessible.

The best law firms thrive on good communication between employees. But when some workers alternate between their desks and being away from the office, connecting can be problematic. That's why real-time presence and availability indicators are critical. Having remote workers connected to the office system not only gives those people access to business information, but it also gives coworkers real-time presence and availability information and can help make sure that remote workers are always available during business hours.

This availability is often accomplished by remote employees utilizing call routing schedules and find me/ follow me capabilities, features that sophisticated phone systems will have.



Law firm data will be secure.

Beyond the business risks, there are also concerns about the security of data transmitted using mobile applications. The right apps address these challenges by providing bank-level encryption for stored call logs and authenticating users when calls are made or received. This helps ensure client data, interactions, and business relationships are securely and permanently captured to mitigate risk.

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Keeping employees connected and happy

Mobility and finding the right mobile solution are a bit of a balancing act. As we've shown, there are employee concerns that must be considered when selecting the right mobile app for a law firm. At the same time, there are business concerns that must also be weighed. That's why firms need to spend time investigating their options and give this decision the consideration it deserves.

That means finding the solution that allows a firm to maintain a professional representation no matter where employees may be while also protecting the personal information and time of the employees.

Finding the right mobile application is only half of the battle, though. The other half is getting employees to actually utilize it because, without widespread adoption, the time spent finding the right application was time wasted.

Unfortunately, adoption is one of the more challenging things to get employees to do when it comes to new technology, and this is where many mobile apps fall short.

While many business phone providers have full-featured mobile applications, few are user-friendly. Instead, employees are left having to learn new ways to use their phones for communications. Any app like that will not likely be used. That's why it's critical that application providers design the interface with the user experience in mind and keep functionality familiar.

In addition to being familiar, a mobile application must also be simple. It can't be overloaded with features just for the sake of having them, and they need to be features remote employees would use away from the office.

ESI-Legal's application is an excellent example of one that meets both of these requirements. Designed with mobile employees in mind, the app brings the necessary functions of a desktop business phone to an employee's personal mobile device in a way that requires minimal training with common features of the ESI-Legal desk phone.



Conclusion

We all know the modern workplace is one previous generations would hardly recognize. No longer bound by geography, law firms are increasingly turning to technology to ensure their employees are happy and productive.

Meeting the expectations of attorneys and staff who want increased flexibility while also achieving the business results a firm expects requires sophisticated and continually evolving technology solutions.

